

## Written testimony regarding Connecticut Housing Bills

My fellow Fairfield County suburbanites have manufactured a “local control” crisis by their decades-long exclusionary tactics and their refusal to provide affordable housing, or even to recognize the need for housing.

New Canaanites are concerned about moratoriums, not housing. The Town and many of its citizens have had decades to plan for the future and decades to build housing, but have devoted their considerable resources and energies to opposing housing and creating barriers to any form of diversity.

New Canaan’s belated work in forming an Affordable Housing Committee is (1) decades late, (2) a red herring for the Town’s generation-long opposition to housing, affordable or not, (3) more devoted to scheming its way to a new moratorium which has been denied by the State than to actually building housing, and (4) developing ways to continue to avoid its housing responsibilities. After decades of delay, the new committee’s real purpose is to concoct a plan which prevents housing; there has been no material progress to build housing or even to develop a realistic plan ... and that is because the Town does not want or intend to build.

Like our friends in Darien (who are spending \$100M to buy a park), the Town has tens of millions of dollars for its own projects, but is more proud of its temporary skating rink than it is cognizant of its continuing and historical prominence as a restricted community.

The reality is that many in New Canaan do not want housing, Affordable Housing, outsiders, minorities or non-New Canaanites. It is no accident that the Black population of New Canaan is 0.7%, while the surrounding towns of Stamford and Norwalk are over 50% minority. No one speaks for housing in New Canaan because housing opponents have made support for housing an ugly community ban, including threats to those who favor housing, personal attacks, economic boycotts and social exclusion.

New Canaan wants to (continue to) outsource housing of its town employees, teachers, fire and police to Stamford, Norwalk and towns 60 miles away, as it outsources its hospital, public transportation, utilities and other services to Stamford and Norwalk.

New Canaan’s First Selectman has repeatedly stated that there is no site in New Canaan for housing, and certainly not affordable housing. The exclusionary tropes which earn derision in most of America are standard and acceptable slurs in New Canaan. If you listen to the New Canaan officials, the potential residents of rental housing are ‘undesirables;’ they really don’t want even their own employees, service providers and middle-income working people to live in “their” town.

New Canaan has spent millions of dollars to oppose currently pending affordable housing projects and all prior proposals. Had the Town saved and invested those millions, they could have built housing. The existing housing was built following kicking and screaming (with a proponent spit at), and only to achieve the Town’s cherished moratorium, so New Canaan wouldn’t have to build, or allow anyone to build housing.

The pending bills seeking to limit housing should be seen for what they are, efforts to protect the wealthiest, most exclusive (exclusionary) communities of Fairfield County from providing housing to their workers. The claim that existing laws aren’t working is correct (to date) because these towns have

focused their considerable resources, time, money and effort, on opposing rather than building housing. Rights of first refusal will prevent any housing proposals in these towns because no one will spend the millions of dollars necessary to get a project approved, knowing that it can be bought (i.e. taken away) after approval. Why take the risk? Reducing the 8-30g *goal* doesn't build a home. Local control is a slogan to keep things as they are and reinforce the exclusionary status quo. Even more telling are opponents' claims that they don't want rentals because home ownership is necessary to create generational wealth. They don't want rentals because they know *owned* affordable housing will never get built.

New Canaan and state representative O'Dea claim 8-30g is not working because no housing has been built. He (and they) are simply wrong about Darien; and housing will be built in New Canaan if the Town doesn't continue to oppose all housing, and especially Affordable Housing. According to the First Selectman, there is no appropriate site (despite the hundreds of acres the Town owns). According to the Planning & Zoning Commission, there is no site in New Canaan where traffic is not too unsafe, where water and drainage are not too wet, where schools are not too crowded, where neighbors are not too threatened, where climate change is not too dangerous, or where character is not too threatened to host housing for good people.

The theme throughout these bills is that current legislation is not working. It is not working because these towns do not want working people in their town, they are spending millions of dollars to oppose housing, and repeatedly make the point that "these people" do not deserve to live in their towns. According to these bills, working people and housing can be outsourced to Stamford, Norwalk and Bridgeport, as they are now.

The important issue is housing, not moratoriums. The opponents of housing are more worried about who lives in their towns than they are about providing working people with safe, affordable housing and not having to commute hours to find it. Community requires housing.